Saving our heritage

"Doing our duty is not always pleasant, however much that is to be regretted; but circumstances sometimes alter cases and this is one of them. As I look at the earnest faces before me I remember that it is time -- high time, that Americans should be in earnest if they really care for the institutions bequeathed them by their sires. A right goodly heritage it is, but I am afraid we do not rightly appreciate it."

Spoken by Paul Berton on February 23, 1894 as he presented an American flag to the city to be flown over Memorial Park.

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By DAVID BAUM

Those works of wisdom were spoken 88 years ago by a leading Carbondale citizen. But they hold as much truth today as they did in 1894.

If Carbondaleans "really care for the institutions bequeathed them by their sires" they would support efforts to save and use these institutions built years ago for a purpose.

And the support that grew immediately after the restoration effort to repair City Hall and the tower clock started three months ago proves residents are again ready to care. The proposed renovations by the Adams CATV Inc. firm, who purchased the old Miners & Merchants Bank building, also shows some people are ready to restore and use again a solidly built institution passed on by Carbondale ancestors.

In the many years before these two efforts started, the caring for these buildings and Memorial Park was left to a few people, or no one at all. Most people had stopped caring about them. The Benjamin Franklin High building was abandoned, like the M&M Bank building, and no new constructive use was found for these two buildings and several others, too. (The Gravity Railroad Shops off North Main Street is another example.).

Mr. Berton's words "But I am afraid we do not rightly appreciate it" describe accurately many people's feelings about their heritage in the Pioneer City. Few appreciated the fine work that went into the buildings – work that can never be duplicated.

But now two efforts have been started to turn the tide of "not rightly appreciating" those classical architectural wonders that were abandoned and once again making them beautiful, useful places to work in and enjoy. A group of people have taken a stand and said "We aren't going to let these buildings go to waste. They have a lot of life left to give the Carbondale community and we'll get involved to make sure it happens."

The whole city should be grateful to these people who have made a stand against an uncaring, neglectful and complacent attitude in events concerning the city's heritage. Such herculean efforts are not easy to carry out since a long period of neglect has passed. Those involved in saving Carbondale's architectural heritage need the support of others, money, dedication and time. They need others in the community that will also help take the responsibility left by their ancestors to keep, use and care for "the institutions bequeathed to them by their sires."

Many have responded to the call to help save the city's architectural heritage. We hope others who haven't will soon follow. Carbondale can only benefit from their efforts.